

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
19 JANUARY 2016**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**9**

**TITLE OF REPORT: COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) HALF YEAR  
UPDATE – 01 APRIL 2015 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2015**

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

PORTFOLIO HOLDER – COUNCILLOR LYNDA NEEDHAM

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a summary of Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) received by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and its contractors for the period 01 April 2015 to 30 September 2015.
- 1.2. The report shows that a total of 746 3Cs were received by the Council and its contractors during the six month period, this is a significant decrease when compared to the same period of the previous two years. The decrease is largely as a result of the changes to the waste and recycling service now being fully embedded and a reduction in 3Cs for this area.
- 1.3. The report shows that the number of 3Cs (746) have decreased when compared to the same period of the previous two years; 1013 in 2014 and 1561 in 2013.
- 1.4. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) received two separate complaints; the LGO investigated both complaints and came to a final decision of no fault found. A brief summary of each can be found in section 8.25.
- 1.5. Further detailed information is provided in Section 8 of this report and a summary of the key aspects of the Council's 3Cs procedure is shown in Appendix A; however to summarise the key headline information is as follows:
  - A total of 746 3Cs were received either directly by NHDC or reported directly to the contractors that provide services on behalf of NHDC, this total comprises of the following:
    - Comments – 133
    - Compliments - 287
    - Complaints – 326 including 9 which were escalated to Stage 2 of the complaints process
- 1.6. Of the 746 3Cs received, 258 were received directly by the Council and 488 were received by the contractors providing services on our behalf.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the continued good performance in managing 3Cs between 01 April 2015 and 30 September 2015.
- 2.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the number of 3Cs received has decreased when compared to the same period of the previous two years.
- 2.3 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note that the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) received two complaints about NHDC. The LGO investigated both complaints and came to a final decision of no fault found for both.

## **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 This report allows corporate consideration of the 3Cs received by the Organisation and our contractors as a whole, and by key services to allow issues raised formally by our customers to be understood and the positive action taken by the Council to be reviewed. This is part of our quality based approach to complaints management in line with national accreditation systems.

## **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 No alternative options have been considered as this report is an update report for information only.

## **5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS**

- 5.1 No general consultation has been carried out as this report is an update for information only, although the contents have been discussed with the relevant portfolio holder.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 The Council places high importance and value on running an effective 3Cs procedure which supports our corporate priorities of working with our communities and living within our means by ensuring that we respond effectively to customer feedback and continue to deliver fit for purpose services that our customers value whilst achieving value for money. To support this we ensure that we:
  - Respond to complaints within an appropriate timescale and in a courteous and efficient manner.
  - Listen to our customer feedback, taking measures where appropriate to improve services as well as learn from what our customers tell us we do well.
  - Clearly publicise our complaints procedure to all customers.
  - Have an effective training and complaints management system enabling a consistent and responsive approach.
  - Comply with Local Government Ombudsman requests in a timely and efficient manner.
  - Keep up to date with LGO guidance and training and case study material
  - Ensure that the 3Cs system continues to be robust and effective in line with ISO 10002/2004 – the internationally recognised quality standard for a complaints management system.

## 8. ISSUES

### 8.1 Issues Received and Summary of Performance

During the six month period 01 April to 30 September 2015, the Council received approximately 400,000 contacts; this figure does not include emails received directly by officers and service areas, web and social media traffic or contact made directly with our contractors, it is made up of the following:

- All telephone calls into the Council via the Customer Service Centre (CSC) and direct lines to officers
- All emails into the CSC
- Face to face customers seen at the CSC

8.2. A total of 746 3Cs were received either directly by NHDC or reported directly to the contractors that provide services on behalf of NHDC, this total comprises of the following:

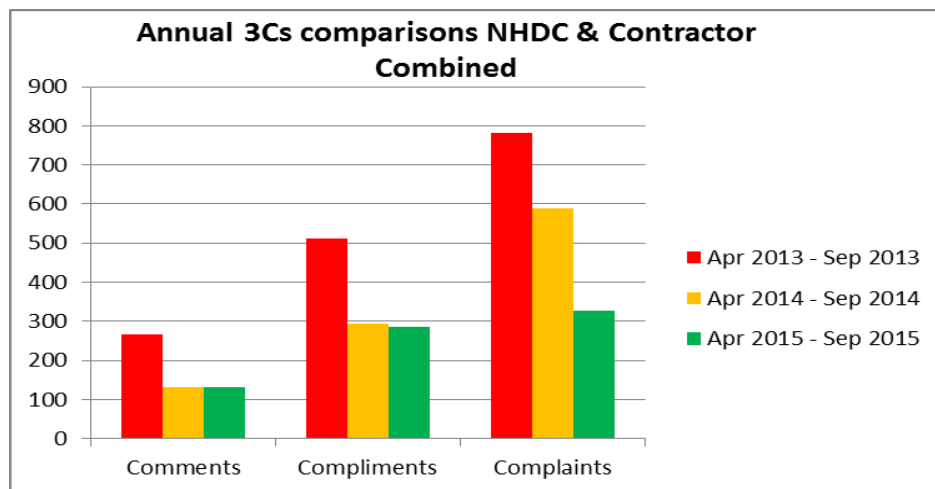
- Comments – 133
- Compliments - 287
- Complaints – 326

8.3. Of the 746 3Cs received, 258 were received directly by the Council and 488 were received by the contractors providing services on our behalf, this is shown by 3C type in the table below. When considered against the high number of contacts received, the percentage of contacts resulting in a formal complaint directly to the Council is very low at 0.08%

April – September 15	NHDC	Contractors	Combined
Comments	39	94	133
Compliments	131	156	287
Complaints	88	238	326

8.4. 3Cs are received and recorded in a number of ways, those received directly by the Council and are recorded on the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) enabling effective tracking and reporting. Contractors record and manage their own 3Cs and report this information regularly back to the Council as part of the on going contract management process.

8.5. The total number of 3Cs received has decreased in comparison to the same periods of the previous two years, as shown in the chart below.

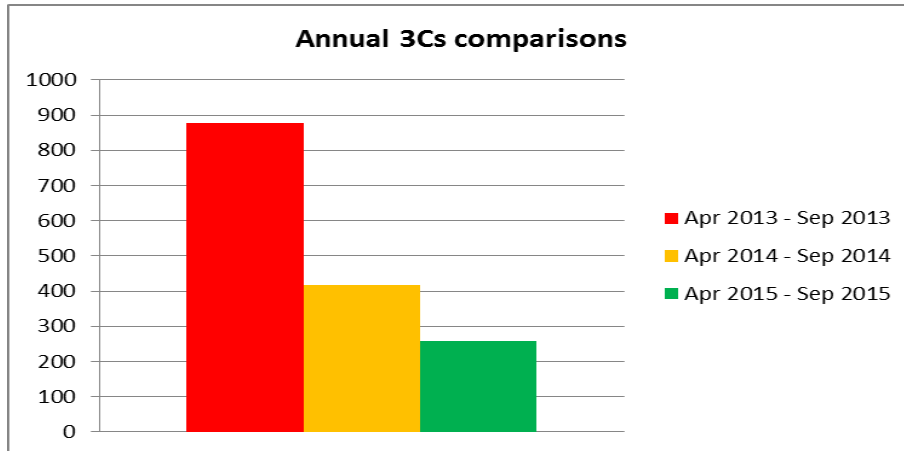


8.6. **3Cs received directly by the Council (excluding Contractors)**

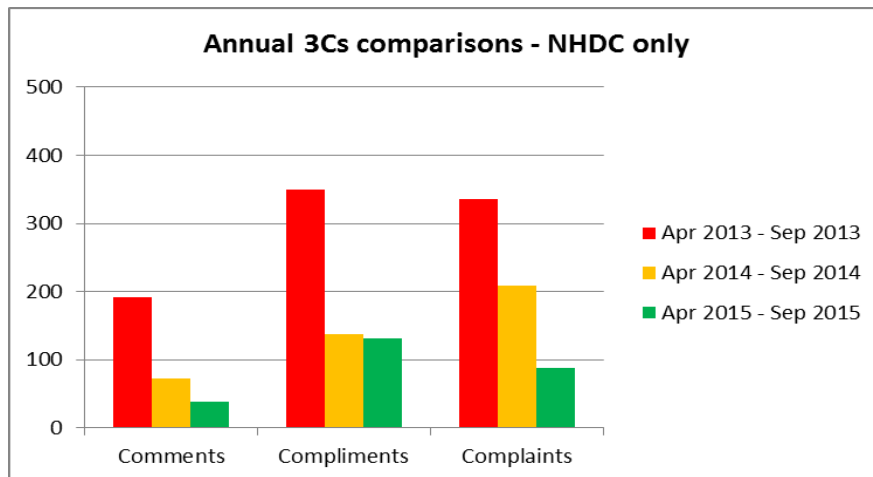
258 3Cs were received directly by the Council, the breakdown of this is as follows:

- Comments – 39
- Compliments – 131
- Complaints – 88

As shown in the chart below, 3Cs reported directly to the Council is at its lowest for three years.



8.7. The chart below shows that complaints are now at a much lower level than before the waste service changes, introduced in 2013, which generated an increase in complaints and comments. The volume of compliments has also decreased, mainly as a result of the closure of the Museums which have historically received high numbers of compliments.



## 8.8. What customers were unhappy about

The table below shows the breakdown of 3Cs by Directorate and Service Area and includes contractors data where denoted by an asterix.

Chief Executive Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Land Charges	0	0	0
Democratic Services	0	0	0
Customer Services Directorate	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Communications	2	1	0
Customer Service Centre	2	8	0
Grounds Maintenance *	2	17	26
Human Resources	0	0	0
Leisure *	145	98	58
Parking Services	1	1	5
Parks and Open Spaces	1	3	4
Waste Management *	19	71	187
Finance, Policy & Governance	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Benefits	0	1	3
Active Communities	1	33	0
Information Unit	0	1	2
Legal	0	0	1
Post & Admin	0	5	0
Property Services	0	0	0
Revenue Technical	3	0	0
Revenues Billing & Recovery	1	4	16
Risk Management & Insurance	0	0	1
Planning, Housing and Enterprise	Comments	Compliments	Complaints
Building Control	0	2	2
Careline	1	30	0
Community Safety	0	0	0
Enforcement	0	1	0
Environmental Health - Commercial	0	0	3
Environmental Health - Protection	0	2	1
Food Health & Safety	0	0	0
Housing Needs	0	5	5
Licensing & Enviro-Crime	0	0	2
Planning Control & Conservation	0	4	6
Planning Policy	5	0	4
Private Sector Housing	0	0	0
<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>326</b>

- 8.9. The majority (85.8%) of complaints received by both NHDC and our contractors relate to services provided by the Customer Services Directorate, this is consistent with previous years and not surprising given the high levels of customer interactions and service provision from the Directorate. 57% of complaints were in relation to the waste and street cleaning service, 18% relate to leisure services and 8% for grounds maintenance.
- 8.10. The complaints received regarding the waste service are generally operational, mostly regarding missed collections, spillages and crew actions. The Waste Services Manager has been working closely with Veolia to make operational improvements and has been using the 3Cs data collected to identify where those improvements could be made. This will have been a contributory factor in the reduction in complaints about the waste service, accompanied by the fact the levels have naturally reduced following an increase in complaints during and following the last significant service change.
- 8.11. Whilst the highest volume of complaints relate to the waste service, it is important to consider this data alongside the high number of collections that are carried out by Veolia. There are approximately 93,750 collections per week. As a percentage of collections the level of complaints is very low at 0.007% for this six month period. Other performance measures indicate that the service is well embedded with public satisfaction at a historically high level with a six percentage increase from 79% in 2011 to 85% in 2013, additionally 60.2% of waste collected is now being recycled or composted.
- 8.12. The waste service management team have been working closely with Veolia in response to customer feedback to identify areas where customer service improvements could be made, some of the changes implemented include improvements to the online booking system for bulky waste collections and the online waste collection calendar, the introduction of a newsletter to Veolia crews to include feedback and additional locations for WEEE recycling events in 2016.
- 8.13. A text alert service was introduced in 2013 to enable us to quickly inform residents who have subscribed to the service of changes to schedules or services, we currently have approximately 1000 subscribers and we routinely send text alerts advising of changes to the collection schedule for Bank Holidays. Additionally we now have just under 7000 Twitter followers, and Social Media is pro actively used to provide regular service updates to our Twitter and Facebook followers.

8.14. **Complaint Response Performance**

Of the 88 complaints received directly by NHDC the percentage of complaints responded to in full within the target response time of 10 working days was 79%. Regular reporting of outstanding 3Cs enables the CSC team to highlight to Managers complaints that are in breach of the Service Level.

- 8.15. Complaints should ideally be responded to in full within 10 working days however in some cases this is not possible due to the complexity of the complaint. It is not unreasonable for a complaint to take more than 10 days to resolve, particularly Stage 2 complaints which generally take longer to resolve. It is important that a complainant is kept informed of the progress of their complaint and is made aware of when a resolution can be expected.

8.16 The CRM system was changed in 2014 and the new system has inbuilt automatic workflow to send timed reminders when complaints are not resolved within the target response time, additionally escalations have been built to alert a Manager if a complaint continues to remain overdue despite reminders. The percentage of complaints responded to within 10 days has increased since the introduction of the automatic reminders and escalations, 73% was achieved for the same period of the previous year.

8.17 NHDC continues to give a high profile to the 3Cs process via our website and leaflets that tell residents how to make a comment, compliment or complaint. It is important that we continue to hear from residents about their views of the service we provide so that we can continuously seek to improve, therefore we should not be concerned that we continue to receive complaints despite taking appropriate corrective action.

8.18 **What customers were happy about**

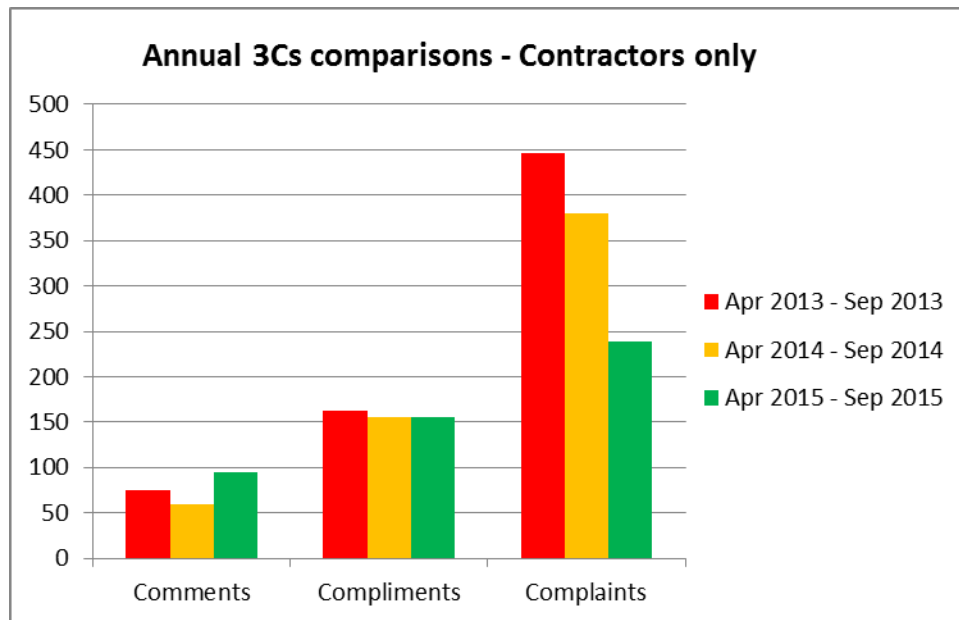
Of the 131 compliments received, 34% were for Leisure, 25% for waste management, 11% for Active communities with 10% for Careline. We know from experience and industry data that customers are less likely to pay a compliment about good service than complain about an unsatisfactory experience.

8.19 **3Cs reported directly to the Contractors providing services on our behalf**

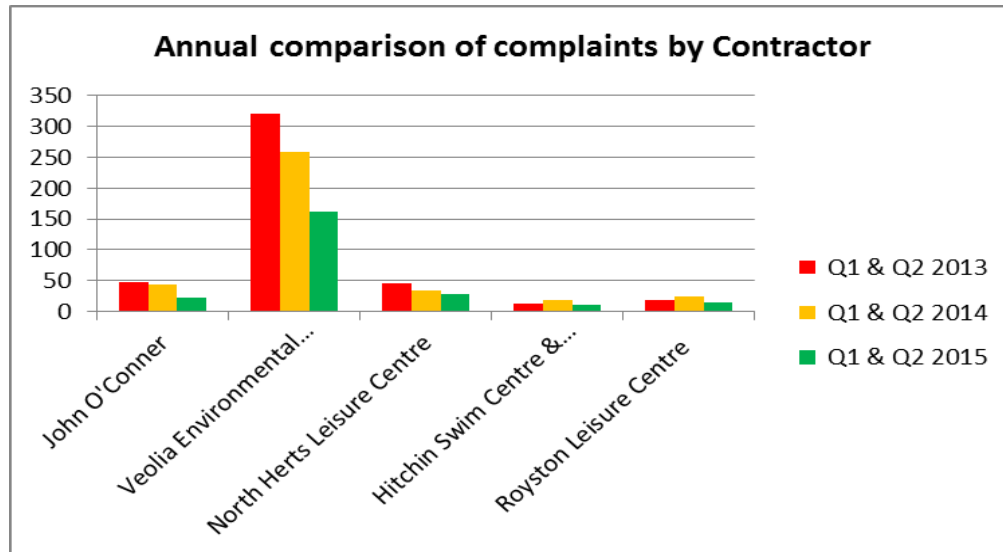
During this six month period 488 3Cs were received by the contractors, this is a decrease from 595 for the same period of the previous year. The breakdown of Contractor 3Cs is shown in the two charts below, however to summarise the 488 3Cs comprise of the following;

- Comments - 94
- Compliments - 156
- Complaints – 238

8.20 The chart below shows that as with 3Cs reported directly to NHDC the volumes of complaints reported to all contractors collectively is decreasing and is at the lowest level for three years.



8.21 All contractors have had a reduction in the number of complaints. Complaints to John O’Conner have reduced considerably since 2012 which saw a spike in complaints as a result of the adverse weather impacting on service delivery. Additionally the current contract with John O’Conner commenced in 2012 which is more aligned with customer expectations and is a good example of continuing improvement in this service area. Whilst the complaints to Veolia had increased in 2013 following the service changes.



8.22 All three leisure centres have had a decrease in complaints received whilst visitor numbers to North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin Swim Centre increased. When considered alongside the number of visits each centre received during the six months the percentage of visits that resulted in a complaint is very low as shown in the table below:

April – September 15	North Herts Leisure Centre	Hitchin Swim Centre & Archers	Royston Leisure Centre
Number of complaints	29	10	15
Number of Visitors	242,126	218,428	157,730
% of complaints per visitor	0.01%	0.004%	0.009%

8.23 All contractor complaints are reviewed and monitored through contract management meetings with appropriate action plans put in place where required.

**8.24 Channels used to report a 3C**

Telephone and email continue to be channels that are highly used to register a 3C. Additionally Social Media such as Twitter and more recently Facebook are growing channels for customers to contact us; we monitor these channels also for signs of dissatisfaction so that we can pro actively deal with and resolve matters promptly.



8.25 **Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)**

Two complaints were taken to the LGO, a brief description and outcome of each is detailed in the table below.

Complaint description	LGO decision / outcome
Housing allocation	No fault found
Housing allocation	No fault found

8.26 NHDC coordinated and hosted a training event run by the LGOs office in October 2014 covering effective complaint handling and carrying out investigations. The training was attended by 12 NHDC officers who have responsibility for complaint handling along with 11 colleagues from other Councils.

8.27 **Corporate 3Cs work**

NHDC has been accredited in previous years to ISO 10002/2004, the internationally recognised quality standard for complaints management systems.

8.28 As the complaints management system is embedded and working effectively with robust management and reporting processes in place, the formal accreditation process is no longer carried out resulting in an annual saving of £2,500.

8.29 Complaint information is reported to managers on a regular basis. The Customer Service Manager also discusses complaints with service managers as part of an ongoing review process.

8.30 The recent introduction of a corporate performance dashboard enables high level reporting of complaint handling performance to the senior management team on a quarterly basis.

**9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There is no legal requirement to operate a complaints system. However, the legal consequence of failing to address a complaint through the 3Cs procedure could be significant. Best practice illustrates that complaints dealt with at an early stage reduce escalation, potentially avoiding a legal claim.

9.2 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference state that it is entitled to scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and / or services.

**10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Claims for damages and compensation could be significant should the 3Cs procedure not be followed. Although no specific provision is made for compensation/costs, outside of insurable claims, any costs are found within existing budgets.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 If the Council fails to follow the 3Cs procedure a justified complaint may not be resolved, causing further complaint to the Ombudsman and negative press coverage damaging our reputation as a council, not just a single service.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1 October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5 April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 The authority actively promotes the opportunities available to the public to report issues of concern, to comment on services or to complain. Whilst that can increase the number of 3Cs we ultimately receive, it is important that this access and 'voice' remains available to all parties and all sections of the community. In that respect the council can review its procedures to provide a better service with the resources it has available.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 12.

## **14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 The Council has well established and effective training events to ensure that staff receive behavioural and procedural training specifically for the requirements of the 3Cs procedure.
- 14.2 Training has been provided to enable staff to handle 3Cs using the replacement CRM system.

## **15. APPENDICES**

- 15.1 None

## **16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## 17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 None